5.5 THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE Internet

BY KEVIN M. SAVETZ

The media has become fond of likening the Internet to an "information super highway." This may be so, but most of us spend our first months on the Internet speeding the wrong way down one-way streets, making illegal U-turns and annoying the peace officers.

The Usenet newsgroup **"alt.internet.services"** is a place for questions and answers about the Internet's services. Internauts of all experience levels gather there to find out about the latest 'net tools (let's see: 40 gophers, three bookstores, and two Coke machines...) and to swap questions and answers about Internet services.

If you hang out around new Internet users long enough, you start to see a pattern: the same questions pop up again and again as each new batch of "newbies" enters the fray and begins to discover the wonders of the Internet. This article lists several frequently asked questions about Internet services, and more importantly, gives the answers.

1. IS THERE AN ENCYCLOPEDIA ON THE INTERNET?

Yes and no. (I didn't say these would be simple answers!) Before considering whether there is an encyclopedia on the 'net, it's important to know what kinds of information you can generally find there. Remember TANSTAAFL - there ain't no such thing as a free lunch: on the 'net, you're not likely to find free access to anything for which you would typically expect to pay a lot of money.

The type of information you're likely to find on the Internet is free information, such as government documents, works with expired copyrights, works that are in the public domain, and works that authors are making available on an experimental basis to the Internet community. Conversely, there are some types of information you are not likely to find on the Internet, most notably, commercial works which are protected by copyright law. An encyclopedia is one example of this, so there currently aren't any freely accessible encyclopedias.

Waitaminute! There are indeed encyclopedias on the 'net, but they are part of closed systems, available (for example) only to students at a specific university, or employees at a certain company. (Sites with this sort of information are usually bound by licensing agreements that state in the strictest terms that only users at that institution may access the database.) The reason for this is about what you'd expect: the companies that make encyclopedias are in business to sell encyclopedias, and you don't stay in business by giving away your product.

So, while the Internet does contain a vast array of good stuff, it can't always replace a trip to a decent library. Walk down the hall and ask the other users at your site if there is an online encyclopedia available for your use. If you can't find one, ask your library if they have one, use an encyclopedia on a commercial online

service like CompuServe or America Online, get one on CD-ROM, or (oh, the horror!) amble to the library and thumb through a traditional encyclopedia.

Finally, a caveat: New services are being added to the Internet every day, and someone could put an encyclopedia online. Businesses are flocking to sell their wares on the Internet - who knows if someone will plug in the World Book as a free sample or even on a pay-per-search basis? All we can do is wait and see.

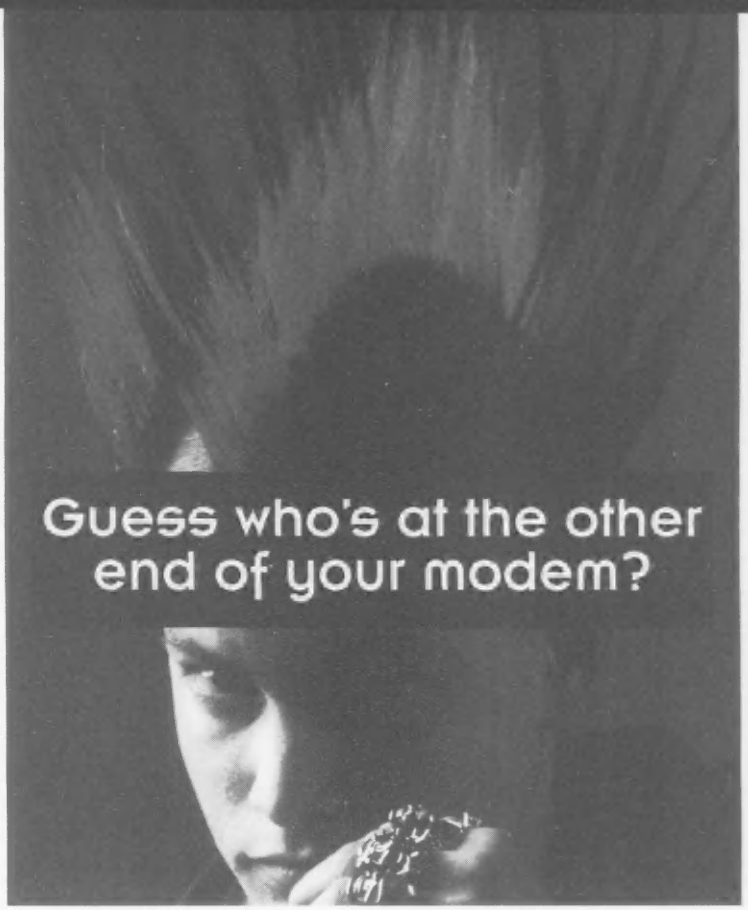
2. HOW DO I SEND ELECTRONIC MAIL FROM THE INTERNET TO ANOTHER NETWORK?

Mail moving between computer networks can be thought of as being carried by a messenger moving a message between cities. At some point in his travels, the messenger must exit one city (or network) and enter another. The transition is called a "gateway." Passing through the gate is easy - all you need is the address of the service to which you are sending mail as well as the username of your intended recipient.

What's the address? It depends on the service. This was covered in the August 1993 edition of Online Access (page 28.) However, there are notable additions. BIX (the Byte Information Exchange, the sister-service of DELPHI) has become the second online service to offer full Internet access. You can send to a BIX user with the address "**username@bix.com**".

Prodigy, after months of teasing, has announced that its Internet mail gateway is in the final stages of testing. Although Prodigy users won't be able to use FTP, telnet and other Internet services, they will be able to send and receive e-mail to the Internet. The finished mail gateway should be complete by the time you read this article - try sending mail to your favorite Prodigy user with the address "**user@prodigy.com**" (for example, "BVXF64A@prodigy.com".)

There is quite a bit of information online about using electronic mail and gateways. To learn the basics of e-mail on the Internet, FTP to



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"ftp.sura.net:/pub/nic/network.service.guides/how.to.email.guide". For an extensive listing of how to send mail from one network to another, read the "Inter-Network Mail Guide" edited by Scott Yanoff. You can fetch this guide by anonymous FTP as **"csd4.csd.uwm.edu:/pub/internetwork-mail-guide"**.

3. HOW DO I FIND SOMEONE'S E-MAIL ADDRESS?

With so many computer systems and users in the world, it is impossible to keep a complete "white pages" of the Internet. The problem is compounded because people come and go from the 'net all the time. (For instance, thousands of students come and go every nine months.) Storing and updating that much information would be a daunting task.

It's not totally impossible to find people on the 'net. The more information you know about your associate - name, place of business or school, and so on - the better your chances are of finding his or her e-mail address. Programs exist that, given some amount of information about your associate, can help you track down his or her e-mail address. These tools include Netfind, X.500, the Usenet-posters search, and WHOIS.

For more information on these address-tracking programs and how to find someone on the Internet, you should read: "FAQ: How to find people's E-mail addresses." (FAQ stands for frequently asked questions.) It's available via e-mail by sending **"send usenet/news.answers/finding-addresses"** in the body of an e-mail message to **"mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu"**. This document is also posted regularly to the Usenet group **"news.answers"**. A program at that address will read your mail, process your request, and reply with mail containing the FAQ.

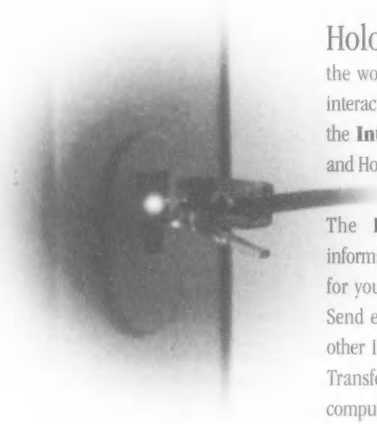
There is another long document specifically for finding college students' e-mail addresses. It is posted to **"news.answers"**. You can also get the file by anonymous FTP to **"rtfm.mit.edu:/pub/usenet/soc.college/Student_Email_Addresses"**. Or you can send a mail message to **"mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu"** with a message body of **"send usenet/soc.college/Student_Email_Addresses"**.

Don't forget to use traditional means of communication when necessary. If you have your associate's telephone number, call him or her up and just ask for the e-mail address.

4. WHERE CAN I GET INTERNET ACCESS IN MY AREA?

This used to be a tough question, because many of the resources for finding Internet access are on the Internet itself. This created a sort of a quandary - you needed access to the Internet to find out how to access the Internet. Thanks to new Internet service providers that are available nationally, it's now possible to get online

Plug into the Internet!



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with exceptional ease, start looking around, then search for "better" access. Delphi was the first commercial service to provide full access and will connect you to the Internet for about $1 an hour. Call 1-800-695-4005 to talk to a human about Delphi.

Also, check out one of the many fine books about getting connected to the Internet, such as Ed Krol's "Whole Internet User's Guide and Catalog," which lists dozens of Internet service providers.

If you are a college student or faculty member, check with your campus computer center to learn about the online facilities available to you. Many schools offer free accounts to students and staff. Once you're online, there are other resources to consult for Internet access. Access provider information from the book "Internet: Getting Started," is available via anonymous FTP as "**ftp.nisc.sri.com:/netinfo/internet-access-providers-us.txt**" and "**ftp.nisc.sri.com:/netinfo/internet-access-providers-non-us.txt**".

Next, read PDIAL, a list of public access service providers offering dialup access to Internet connections. PDIAL lists both free and pay services all around the world. The PDIAL list is posted semi-regularly to "**alt.internet.access.wanted**", "**alt.bbs.lists**", "**ba.internet**", and "**news.answers**". To receive PDIAL via e-mail, send e-mail with a message body of "**send usenet/news.answers/pdial**" to "**mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu**". To get PDIAL via FTP as "**ftp.netcom.com:/pub/info-deli/public-access/pdial**".

Also available is NIXPUB, a listing of over 100 free and pay-for-play accessible systems. It is posted regularly to the Usenet newsgroups "**comp.misc**", "**comp.bbs.misc**", and "**alt.bbs**". Retrieval information is near the end of this document.

For more information about service providers and getting on the Internet, read "FYI: Searching for Treasure," FTPable as "**nic.merit.edu:/documents/fyi/fyi_10.txt**".

Another list of service providers, and tips on getting Internet access, is provided in the "**alt.bbs.internet**" FAQ, available via FTP as "**rtfm.mit.edu:/pub/usenet/news.answers/inet-bbs-faq.Z**".

You can also turn to the Usenet community for assistance. Find out if there is a local newsgroup for your area or state. For instance, Columbus, Ohio users can check on the "**oh.general**" and "**cmh.general**" newsgroups. Many other areas have regional newsgroups. Ask the locals questions about the area - who better to know the answers?

If all else fails, post your plea for Internet access to the Usenet newsgroup "**alt.internet.access.wanted**". Note that such requests aren't looked kindly upon if posted elsewhere.

5. IS THERE A LIST OF ALL INTERNET SERVICES?

This is my favorite question, beause it is so common and the answer is so simple: no! There are just too many computers and too many services for anyone to accurately maintain a complete list of Internet services.

However, Scott Yanoff edits a great list of Internet services. It's called the "Special Internet Connections List" which is updated biweekly and is posted periodically to the Usenet group "alt.internet.services". His list is as comprehensive as any could ever be. It includes everything from where to FTP pictures from space, how to find agricultural information, public UNIX, online books and dictionaries, you name it. Check this list before posting the question "Where can I get <whatever> online?" - chances are, it's in there. Finger "**yanoff@csd4.csd.uwm.edu**" to find ways to receive this list.

There's also John December's "**internet-cmc**" list, which serves as a pointer to a slew of resources. Its purpose is to list pointers to information describing the Internet, computer networks, and issues related to computer-mediated communication. It points to Internet documents for new users, comprehensive Internet guides, as well as specialized and technical information (for instance, Internet growth studies, maps, and statistics.) It also lists electronic journals and tons of other good things. It is available via anonymous FTP as "**ftp.rpi.edu:/pub/communications/internet.cmc**".

Also, check out the Internet Resource Guide. This is an excellent guide to major resources available on the network. It includes chapters on Computational Resources, Library Catalogs, Archives, White Pages, Networks, Network Information Centers, and Miscellaneous. It is FTPable as "**nnsc.nsf.net:/resource-guide/resource-guide.txt.tar.Z**".

Those ought to keep you busy for a while.

5.5 BUT WAIT! I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT...

Sorry! Whole books have been published about the Internet's services. The best way to learn is to get online, start to explore, ask around, and read all the FAQs that you can.

One which I modestly promote (only because I am the editor of the document) is the "Internet Services Frequently Asked Questions and Answers" list, a file that answers 25 FAQs about the Internet. For the most recent version, FTP to "**rtfm.mit.edu:/pub/usenet/news.answers/internet-services/faqor**". Or send an email message to "**mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu**" with a line in the body of the message reading "**send usenet/news.answers/internet-services/faq**".

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